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UNDERSTANDING OTHERS - POLICE AND MINORITIES

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I find myself somewhat overwhelmed by the implications of the topic assigned to me. The simple base upon which this discussion stands is found in the phrase, "Understanding Others." I am sure that there have been millions of people who have wished at some time in their lives that they possessed the wisdom and the persuasiveness to develop this seemingly simple premise to the point of influencing human interaction. Because, of course, the very reason we are assembled here this week is one of acknowledging that we do not understand others; nor do others understand us - at least to the degree that we could find solutions to our sticky human relations problems.

This topic also implies, in its dual application, that this art of achieving understanding is a two-way street; that it is not just one of correcting the thoughts and actions of the other guy - but that it entails also some self-examination to determine how we may improve our own thoughts and actions, no matter what our station in life; no matter how weighty our responsibilities or high our ideals and expectations. And, let's admit it; one of the most difficult tasks in seeking understanding of others and with others, is that of admitting our own weaknesses, uncertainties, insecurities, fears and prejudices, as a first step toward objective thinking.

The Institute theme, "Working Together In Achieving Liberty and Justice For All" announces a goal - something to be desired and to work for. Most of all, something we can demonstrate in this our willingness to meet in open exchange of ideas; to gripe and hear gripes, to criticize and hear criticism, which is the beginning of the process of "working together." In my own approach to the topic and the theme, I find it necessary to examine quite critically those forces, natural and inspired, which have prevented the degree of "working together" which could be seen as a constructive approach to the whole problem of efficient law enforcement in the American community.

Before discussing either of the immediate parties designated in this title, the Police and the Minorities, let us examine the backdrop before which these two highly visible elements in the caste play their respective roles on the stage of life. Both operate in a community with which each has to adjust, and from which both derive recognition, their places in the sun. The broad community and its people, through their attitudes, determine the color, direction and intensity of the

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spots or floodlights which illuminate the action of both groups. It is this public that determines what kind of police force it shall have, the recognition it shall give, the kind of support in the intricate task of law enforcement it supplies, the standards of recruitment, training, compensation, it considers adequate to do the community's work. It is this public that first sets the salary standards; these in turn dictating the quality of men who will respond to recruitment appeals and be able to profit from the training they receive.

Sensitizing this public to its responsibilities and its blind neglect is very important as a first step in achieving understanding, because many of the problems of law enforcement in the community are there because of public indifference, misunderstanding, and even hostility toward those to whom they entrust their lives and property. It is my firm belief that the conventional public relations approach of the police department in the average American city is woefully inadequate in trying to arouse awareness of and insight into these important areas of concern. One reason for the development of this kind of Institute - that more people; people deeper in the grass roots of the community; persons responsible for the many people-to-people programs and activities of the broader community - that more such people may begin to seek answers to these painfully self-searching and self-revealing questions.

Now, let's examine the motions of the actors upon the stage. The first character on the Bill is the policeman, according to this title assigned to me. Who is he and what are the obstacles to his giving his best possible performance; what are the hazards, the natural, inescapable hazards of his craft in trying to achieve true understanding in his community, and the cooperation of citizens in the exacting task of law enforcement?

1. By the very nature of his job, he is employed by a society - any society, anywhere - to be the protector, the defender, of the status quo. However society may have defined its standards of conduct, of ethical and moral procedure, of its relationships between men and property and between men and men, the police force is hired to protect those standards. In the main, they are not-too-carefully defined through enactment of statutory law - by these means, the police have their course firmly marked out. But societies also have their guidelines laid down in terms of their unwritten laws - their traditions, customs, social habits, that may be considered equally binding by some police administrators and/or police officers, and these unwritten laws may be enforced as vigorously as the written ones - at least until changing social forces or court review may bring the enforcement practices into disrepute. Nevertheless, it is generally recognized that police are the strongest agency for social control in the

community even though it most frequently is a restraining force. Those persons in society who disagree with a particular aspect of the status quo, and who express this disagreement in social action designed to produce change, almost inevitably find themselves in an adversary relationship with the police and law enforcement forces generally. One hundred ninety years ago, they were the farmers of the Connecticut Massachusetts countryside; nearly a century ago, they were women seeking the right of franchise; seventy-five years ago, it was labor seeking the right to organize; today, it is the racial minorities seeking the fullness of their heritage.

2. By the very nature of their job, police have had to be armed with more authority than any other occupational or professional group in the community. Theirs is the very necessary authority to investigate, interrogate, arrest, charge and prosecute a suspect - any suspect who in their judgment merits such treatment; theirs is the very necessary authority to bear arms at all times, and to use such arms when in the individual's judgment such use is required. In our society, whose charter emphasizes the concept of freedom and the right to dignity of the individual, such authority is granted grudgingly, eyed suspiciously and re-examined carefully and critically. Among many persons innocent of wrongdoing, these emotional reactions to authority reach the level of primitive fear - and whether or not we like the idea, police departments throughout the nation (and the world for that matter) must live with the stark reality of this natural human reaction.
3. The very nature of police work means constant exposure to life on the seamy side; to troublesome people and people in trouble; to the rascal, the neurotic and the psychotic; to the disadvantaged and the dispossessed people, the hungry and the angry people. They are called upon to deal daily - almost hourly - with the unreasonable, the irrational, the prejudiced and the sick. Such constant exposure tends to distort one's view of humanity; tempts the individual so exposed, to measure human nature without benefit of sufficient contact on higher planes wherewith to maintain a balanced picture of man's potential. Cynicism is the inevitable result of such exposure, that is, to the officer who has not had the background and the training with which to protect himself from its corrosive effect; and a cynical officer is rarely an objective, unbiased arbiter when caught in emotion-packed conflict situations.
4. The hitherto prevailing practice of confining police training to the technical aspects of police work, to the almost total exclusion of human relations orientation of some depth, has served to obscure, in the police officer's overview of life and the living, causes, meaning and

by-products of poverty in subcultures or so-called minority groups, thereby tempting one to the destructively contagious use of stereotyping in reference to such groups.

5. The basic need for organizational strength through cohesiveness of its membership, referred to as "esprit de corps" among military and semi-military groups, easily tends toward development of a minority or subculture group outlook, leading ultimately unless checked, to group defensiveness, hypersensitivity, and a sharply critical view of the civilian world or particular segments of that world.

These five hazards present but one side of a social situation to which too little attention has been given by society as a whole, or by either of the major actors in the social drama which takes on more tragic manifestations as time goes by. It basically is the direct result of the neglect of a society that demands much but gives little; a society that insists that it be given assurances of the highest virtue and courage, with small compensation offered in return; a society that considers law enforcement a responsibility which only the police must bear without its own involvement; a society whose many members too frequently follow patterns of action that aggravate rather than relieve difficulties in the law enforcement function.

As stated before, the role of Police as defenders of the status quo very frequently places them in direct and immediate adversary relations with all who are part of organized protest against that status quo. Confrontation upon the inevitable level of emotional involvement of the protest group, invites a responding emotional involvement of police where rigid training and discipline are not present to offer restraint. The deeper the emotions expressed in the protest, the more active the emotional response of those who would curb the protestor. These are the elements of conflict.

In the current American scene, the most vociferous protests are being made by racial minorities and by youth. Whether in the form of blind, angry, individual acts of rebellion against the status quo, or in organized social action, the emotions of protesting persons lead them into direct confrontation with police. Like the current Arab-Israeli confrontation in the Middle East, we hear the charges and counter-charges of protesting groups and of police, each placing the blame for initial acts of aggression upon the other. The most difficult lesson for us to learn seems to be that such confrontation will occur periodically as long as we remain a free nation, because there will always be protest against the status quo, with varying degrees of justification and of emotional involvement. The second most difficult lesson to learn, as demonstrated by our repeated clashes on the social scene, is that strong arm advocacy of a cause, be it by the protestor or the protectors of the status quo, merely invites more of the same, and provides

no solutions to the initial cause for protest. It seems logical therefore to assume that first steps require identification of the protestor, with some explanation for the plight he rejects, together with a reassessment of the philosophy, technique and practice by which these protests may be dealt with more efficiently and with less violence.

It would seem fitting then, to identify and analyze the nature of the protest and the protesting group. The term "minority group" has been applied, perhaps as a simple way of distinguishing between these who represent the status quo, the establishment, the power structure, the majority group (if measured in terms of wealth, power, status and decision making authority) on the one hand, and those who are characterized as "social problems", on the other. For instance, the malihini first encountering the Hawaiian scene, finds a bewildering pattern of human relations as compared with the experience he has known on the mainland. I think I see, not a perfect society from which racial and ethnic bias has been eliminated, but a strong, virile society that has managed to keep such a destructive phenomenon at a minimum. But the virus of such prejudice is in the air, here, and needs the active attention of all who would wish brought to happy conclusion the most exciting laboratory experiment in human history - this one that can teach us how to accept "difference" as a natural and acceptable quality in nature, rather than as a phenomenon that invites hostility and conflict.

In the mainland to a greater degree than is evident in the islands the concept of minority group difference as signifying inferiority is one that demands careful analysis. By application of a number of criteria, one is able to make identification of such minorities, at the same time entering into a more or less superficial analysis of the "why" of such identification.

For instance, High Visibility is the attention-getting quality that denotes difference in our society. In Hawaii, this becomes a difficult kind of criterion to apply, because a numerical majority of the Island population possesses this High Visibility. This may be part of the reason for relative immunity from the more oppressive expressions of ethnic prejudice. In the mainland, High Visibility has invited restriction upon several generations of people involved in migratory movement from the Old World to the New. The difference suggested by language barriers, by Old World dress, customs, cultural life have been excuse enough for restricting those so marked, to the distasteful, low-wage jobs or no jobs at all, to the housing no one else would use, to the insult and mistreatment accorded the poor and the voiceless in a competitive society. But they were able to shed this Old World Visibility in one generation, having had the superior wisdom and foresight to choose White Christian parents.

The extreme example of High Visibility is that imposed by skin pigmentation, which history of the Western world has interpreted as being a badge of ineradicable inferiority, and which is not so easily shed.

But High Visibility, of itself, is not sufficient to make a problem. A dark skinned individual coming into the American community from a so-called backward society, and having a strong foreign accent in his speech, still can find a place in that community if he is not represented in such numbers as to attract attention, excite fear, or provide an irritant to an otherwise reasonably tranquil community climate. So the second criterion, following High Visibility, is Numbers, or size of the irritatingly different population. Because, this in turn provides the third criterion, viz., Threat. However irrational the fear may be, if one is possessed by that fear the threat imposed is real. A threat to one's job security because of supposed unfair competition; a threat to the political control that has prevailed in the past; a threat to the stability of one's property value - and on and on, in contemplation of all the fear that human imagination can conjure - in these we find the emotional seed that germinates and blossoms into the poisonous growth that is minority group prejudice.

The fourth criterion is that supplied by the Nature of History of contact with the subculture. The longer the cultural division and the more violent the relationship, the deeper the roots of fear. The greater the restrictions imposed, the deeper the minority group resentment, the greater the majority group panic, and the weightier the burden of guilt born by that majority group. Value judgments arrived at more or less consciously as a result of the experiences induced by the four preceding criteria, provides some measure of what is considered to be the Assimilability of the out-group under examination - this being the fifth criterion. On the mainland during the past century and longer, European immigrants were considered assimilable in direct proportion to their identification with the Anglo-Gallic-Teutonic strains of Western and Central Europe. This measure of Assimilability waned and lengthened as one reached Eastward and Southward. In the South Pacific, this kind of yardstick has not been feasible nor economically or politically practicable.

Those groups considered less assimilable by whatever emotional or practical motivations, are made less assimilable by self-fulfilling prophecy through the simple process of preventing any meaningful communication from occurring between leadership or spokesmen of the in-group and the out-group. Lack of Communication, then, is the sixth criterion in determining minority group identification, as well as providing one of the potent means for making escape from the group status difficult, if not impossible.

The actual meaning of minority group status, in terms of perpetuating that status and providing its pain and anguish, can be found in the seventh criterion which is that of Exploitation. The existence of the six preceding conditions, almost inevitably means the loss of voice or power by which to prevent exploitation by the power group; exploitation in preventing attainment of a competitive position, through education and experience, wherewith to grow in economic security and self-esteem; exploitation in providing excessive profits to merchants and landowners who are able to trade upon the grave needs and helplessness of the victim group; exploitation in the deprivation of political power, economic self-determination, social mobility and spiritual strength. These exploited ones are the people who are without skill, without dreams and aspirations, without pride or higher motivation, without cultural disciplines and controls - because most of the things upon which these attributes subsist have been destroyed or rendered impotent.

Any group of people, in any part of the world and in any kind of society exposed to this kind of experience, is the group that responds as normal human beings, in abnormal fashion, in reaction to the abnormal conditions under which they are forced to live. Therefore, the minority group of a community, in the real meaning of the term, is that group whose reaction to the total community is characterized (a) by considerable disregard of the mores or professed ethical or moral standards of that community, or (b) by clinging to sub-group cultural practices and standards, showing contempt for the unrealistic expectations held by the majority group community, or (c) in many ways by entering into acts of rebellion and revolt against the dominant society, either as angry rebels in individual assault upon symbols of that society, or in organized protest movements of non-violent or violent character. This is the eighth criterion which we may label Minority Group Reaction, leading immediately into the ninth which is Majority Group Backlash. Within the meaning of these nine criteria, the identity of a minority group in its most sordid connotation can be ascertained. Even superficial observation in this fair city will bring swift identification of at least two such minorities, with a third to be identified as result of a complete ignoring of its existence or presence except in an occasional police report. (Parenthetically--it's to the credit of Honolulu newspapers, radio and television, that no ethnic identifications are made in reporting crime news, a practice that has accentuated race tensions in the Mainland for many years.) These statements are being made, not in terms of criticism, but in attempts to expose the subtlety of our group prejudices, as our attention is brought to the necessary quest for any basic similarities existing within this evil phenomenon that is Prejudice.

Time will not permit a recapitulation of the five factors interfering with good police-community relations, nor the nine criteria by which a minority group may be identified. These

have been presented in detail in order to focus attention upon the negative conditions imposed by history and continuing social practice, to the great disadvantage of police and community relations. Both parties in the drama are placed in untenable positions by the larger society which has prescribed the limits within which each may act, and that society, in turn, pays the awful price for the conflict which results - conflict that may be measured in terms of individual forays of anti-social nature against that society, or in violent group action by persons inflamed by demagogues or reacting to real or fancied wrongs.

While it is relatively easy to understand police motivation as law enforcement agencies move to suppress crime and disorder, it is a bit more difficult to understand the motivation of minority group members who are caught in their hapless plight.

In addition to absorbing the revealing data disclosed by endless social science research, I have had the privilege and responsibility for nearly half a century of noting the conditions surrounding ghetto living, of wrestling with the evasive problem of employment discrimination and its impact upon educational motivation, of crusading for decades against the evils of the urban slums. These experiences have made clear to me what limited choice is available to the minority group persons in such situations, in seeking adjustment to situations over which they have no direct control.

One such choice is to Submit - to accept as inevitable the depressed role, the second-class citizenship classification and treatment. To "do the best we can" kind of rationalization. Such people are among us always; identified by their lack of ambition, absence of realizable dreams, indifference to the standards of the surrounding society and contemptuous of its criticisms. We of society are prone to blame these people as "lacking any civilized motivations." But wait; what are their alternatives?

Well, they may attempt the very difficult task of Accommodation; meaning in essence, to Submit fully when in contact with the dominant society, in a work situation or whatever, then try to find dignity and self-esteem after a full day of submission which denies the right to these human qualities in this particular human being. The living experience of encountering assault upon one's dignity, of humiliation and insult, of denial of personal respect, through this process of Accommodation, leaves only the sheltered home life in which to seek that dignity and spiritual strength, throughout a hopeless lifetime. This schizophrenic experience works havoc upon the individual personality and upon the family circle in which these contrasting and frustrating experiences are being lived.

The one choice left, within which some semblance of self-respect may be salvaged, is the choice of Resisting - fighting

back - in the several ways one's sense of dignity may be salvaged. This fighting back may take several forms which could be classified in three general areas, namely, by active response to the urge to Excel, to Repel or to Rebel. To Excel, by becoming more competitive, whether in acquisition of wealth and power, as seen in the past century on the mainland where the Horatio Algers story has not always been as inspired or inspirational as its author would have wished us to believe; or as evidenced in the concentration of minorities of past decades in the profitable business of organized crime. Society deplores either kind of such "pushiness" when demonstrated by its lesser breed. Or one may elect the urge to Repel. These are the queer ones, the frightening ones. It is in this group that we find such manifestations as the Black Nationalists, some religious fanatics or the Hippies - but these become a threatening factor in our communities, because their rejection of society, their group separation, becomes a form of social protest and social action.

The third choice is even more threatening to society, when the oppressed group makes its decision to Rebel, as its manifestation of respect-saving resistance. For more than half a century, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People has operated a well-organized rebellion against the status quo, but with only minimal success, because you see, that rebellion was one of utilizing the law of the land, laws enacted at the will of the dominant society, to prove in the higher courts that such laws were discriminatory, and not of truly democratic persuasion. This unprecedented form of social revolt is the truest test of faith in the democratic system, and black rebels refined the methodology.

But as World War II followed upon World War I; as Depression pointed up the economic base of exploitation which has perpetuated our patterns of discrimination, disillusionment set in. Much of the faith in the integrity of our court system was lost, as minority job seekers saw little change in their economic conditions. This faith received a further setback when appeals were won and then lost regarding the equalization of educational opportunity, without which no individual or group may hope to advance. Yet, the educational inequalities have persisted for more than a decade after Court rulings. Many have been the disappointments and disillusionments that caused a new crop of leadership to abandon any semblance of either the act of Submission or of the process of Accommodation. The spirit of Rebellion carried with it an imperative for militant social action, at the onset non-violent in keeping with American avowed principles, even though in practice we are among the most violent of the world's people.

The choices left to minority groups in all part of the land led such groups inevitably into open and direct conflict with the guardians of the community's peace. From the police point of view, the maintenance of peace is the immediate task -

from the point of view of the protestor, change from the status quo is a "must", and the adversary relation has been established.

It is essential that each may recognize the fundamental rightness of the other's position and purpose - that each may see that its own commitment does not necessarily spell violent conflict with the other. It is not inconceivable, nor impossible that the more enlightened minds in each camp may find meeting-ground upon which to set out guidelines; to discover means whereby both, together, may shake the larger society out of its apathy and inconsiderateness.

We who have been engaged in furthering the cause of better police and community relations believe we have found at least the beginning of a method designed to bring more understanding into the equation and to reduce the friction which socio-economic conditions of the American community provide. We believe that citizens generally may not be expected to become partners in law enforcement, until a great many more people on the neighborhood level have understanding of the police job, and have confidence in those who are doing the job. This understanding and confidence are not achieved through the printing of special newspaper articles or fancy brochures - it comes through satisfactory face to face contact, each with the other, under conditions removed from stress and conflict. Out of this type of thinking has come the community council concept of police-citizen relations, where, on the precinct level there is regular communication between citizens and precinct officers.

The "regular" feature of the on-going communication contains the value of the method, because an occasional gripe session does not permit a calm exploration of many areas of mutual concern for officer and homemaker in that precinct community. Such regular sessions of council activity permit the saner side of humanity to emerge, away from the compulsion to adopt a defensive posture or assume a critical role. In other words, what we are trying to do here this week on a state-wide level, we can do from month to month on the precinct level within any municipality in the state. This is Communication, the most sadly needed educational experience in our strife torn world. It is not attained through one-way pronouncements nor in a remote control kind of operation. Eyeball to eyeball confrontation, and honest and honorable exchange of our differences, is the time-tried, simple but effective way of resolving many differences and difficulties. We believe that it works and will work in this area of concern. And, really, it costs so little to test out the theory, and is costing so much to go on at our present pace. Because, in all our American communities, I think it is well to remind ourselves constantly in these days of rapid and drastic social change, of the statement made by the late President Kennedy to the heads of Latin-American states:

"They who make peaceful revolution impossible
make violent revolution inevitable."

Police and ethnic minorities may be in the thick of the fray where these revolts are being staged, but it is the larger society that is footing the bill of costs of each incident. It becomes our duty either as adversaries or as teammates, preferably the latter, to cause a closer look at the conditions which cause these actions, bringing that larger society into our councils so that together we may truly say, in the language of the Institute theme:

We are "Working Together In Achieving Liberty and
Justice For All."

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